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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR PRIORITY 0216
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 1472
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7886
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR PRIORITY 0217
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 1473
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY

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STATE PASS DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION
USAID FOR OFDA: MSHIRLEY and AFR/EA

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TAGS: [CASC](#) [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: PLANE CRASH KILLS DOZENS IN GOMA, EASTERN CONGO

REF: 07 KINSHASA 1183

¶1. (U) Summary. A Congolese airliner carrying 79 passengers and 5 crew members crashed on takeoff from Goma airport in eastern Congo at 14:45 local time on April 15, killing dozens of people including passengers and persons on the ground. The majority of passengers appear to have survived, but exact numbers are unavailable. The pilots apparently attempted to abort takeoff, possibly after a blown tire, but continued off the runway and into a crowded neighborhood near a market area. USG personnel in Goma have determined that four U.S. citizens, all members of the same family, are among the survivors and are being cared for in a local hospital. End summary.

¶2. (U) A U.S.-made DC-9, owned and operated by Congolese airline Hewa Bora, en route to Kinshasa via Kisangani, crashed on takeoff from Goma airport, eastern Congo, on Tuesday afternoon at 14:45, killing dozens of persons, including people on the ground in the Birere neighborhood next to the airport. Early eyewitness reports indicate that the pilots attempted to abort the takeoff, possibly in response to a blown tire, but were unable to prevent the plane from leaving the runway, plowing into a densely populated area that included a market, and bursting into flames. USG personnel in Goma, there working on the Goma Peace Process, have determined that many, perhaps most, of the passengers survived the crash. They report that four U.S. citizens listed on the plane's manifest, all members of the same family, survived the crash and are being cared for at the Heal Africa hospital in Goma. The extent of their injuries is not known at this time.

¶3. (U) Goma airport, on the east side of crowded Goma town, along the DRC border with Rwanda, is the base for many U.N. Mission to the DRC (MONUC) planes and helicopters, but few passenger carriers at this time. Hewa Bora, which only recently began flying between Kinshasa and Goma, was the only remaining commercial carrier since the departure of Air Bravo and the grounding, reportedly for mechanical reasons, of the U.S.-owned carrier CAA. The runway, which runs north-south along the Rwandan border, is shorter now than it was five years ago at the time of the Nyiragongo Volcano eruption, which dumped lava at the north end of the runway, shortening it and making it unusable for the large cargo aircraft that used to land there. (Note: there was talk recently of an initiative to remove the lava from the runway and return it to its former length. End note.) Flights in and out of Goma, including MONUC planes, helicopters, and dozens of cargo flights from the

interior, pass over heavily crowded portions of town before heading out over Lake Kivu to the south and on to their destinations.

¶4. (SBU) Comment. Because of the humanitarian crisis and ongoing conflict in eastern Congo's North Kivu province, Goma is the base of operations for not only MONUC and many of its peacekeeping forces, but also for dozens of UN and international organizations staffed by Congolese and hundreds of expatriate personnel. While many peacekeeping, humanitarian and development workers are able to fly on MONUC aircraft (including well-maintained but infamous Antonov planes, otherwise officially banned now in the DRC), businesspersons and embassy personnel are normally forced to find seats on commercial aircraft. This had become more difficult lately, despite increased attention to the conflict and humanitarian needs of North Kivu. This crash will certainly give pause to those used to flying commercial aircraft in the DRC. End Comment.

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